

Child Welfare Services Branch	HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES POLICY ANNOUNCEMENT	
	Policy No: PA 2005-6	Issuance Date: 07/01/05
	Subject: MAINTAINING AND ENHANCING FAMILY CONNECTIONS FOR CHILDREN UNDER VOLUNTARY, COURT-ORDERED, AND PERMANENT CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES	

POLICY DIRECTIVE

Research on family connections and visitation cited by the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning have shown that frequent, purposeful and consistent visitation for children in foster care constitutes best practices in child welfare. These practices are as follows:

- ? Visitation helps maintain the parent-child connection and preserves the continuity of the relationship.
- ? More frequent parent-child visitation is associated with shorter placements in foster care and children more likely to be returned to their parents' care.
- ? Decreases a child's behavioral problems in foster care when visits are provided on a regular basis.

A key finding of the 2003 Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) on Hawaii's child welfare system indicated that Child Welfare Services Branch (CWSB) did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2: *The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children*. The CFSR found that CWSB "was not consistent in its efforts to preserve connections between children and their families" and that visiting with parents and siblings in foster care is an area needing improvement.

This policy directive affirms CWSB's policy that all children in out-of-home placement shall have visits with their birth parents and siblings who are not placed with them, other family members, and their family support network. The Department's goal is to ensure the safety and well-being of the child during these visits.

Visits are to promote positive, safe and non-blaming connections between the child, his/her parents, caregivers, siblings or other important people in the child's life. **Permitting or withholding visits shall never be used as reward or punishment for the parent or the child.**

CWSB workers shall involve all the parties, including but not limited to, birth parents, foster parents, the guardians-ad-litem, family members, the child/ren, therapist for parents and/or child/ren, in developing a written visitation plan. All parties must know about the plan and their responsibilities, and copies of the visitation plan shall be provided to all parties.

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Visits shall occur in the least restrictive, most home-like setting or natural family events, including but not limited to, school activities, sports events, or religious services, and not at CWSB offices unless a closely supervised, structured, and monitored environment is warranted to maintain the child/dren's safety. Supports and therapeutic services shall be provided by CWSB to the child/ren, parents, and/or foster parents in order to facilitate, promote, and maintain ongoing family connections.

Any suspension or termination of visitation shall have the **written prior approval** of the Section Administrator, including a complete explanation in writing as to why visitation should be suspended or terminated and for how long.